

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03
 INR-10 NSAE-00 ICA-11 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03
 SP-02 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 NSC-05 SS-15 STR-07
 CEA-01 DOE-15 SOE-02 AGRE-00 /110 W
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P R 041840Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6491
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SOCI, ENRG, ABUD, GY
SUBJECT: ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN GUYANA DECLINE FURTHER

REF: GEORGETOWN 0862

1. SINCE REFTEL ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES IN THE GEORGETOWN
AREA HAVE TAKEN ANOTHER SHARP DROP. AN ARTICLE IN THE
APRIL 2 GUYANA CHRONICLE QUOTED THE CHAIRMAN OF THE GEC,
DILLION THOMPSON, AS SAYING THAT THE GUYANESE PUBLIC CAN
EXPECT ANOTHER NINE MONTHS OF BLACK-OUTS AND LOAD-SHEDDING
OPERATIONS BEFORE THE SITUATION RETURNS TO NORMAL.
THOMPSON HELD THAT THE CRUX OF THE GEC'S DIFFICULTIES WAS DUE
TO FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS: INCREASES IN THE COST OF FUEL AND
EQUIPMENT; MAINTENANCE PROBLEMS; AND OUTSTANDING DEBTS OWED
TO THE GEC BY SUBSCRIBERS, BOTH INDIVIDUALS AND GOVERNMENT
MINISTRIES, AMOUNTING TO G\$10M. THOMPSON DENIED THE
SHORTAGES WERE THE RESULT OF A LACK OF BUNKER C FUEL
FOR THE GENERATORS OR THAT THERE WAS A DISCRIMINATORY
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PATTERN IN THE GEC'S SCHEDULE OF LOAD-SHEDDING.

2. HARDLY HAD THOMPSON GOTTEN THIS UTTERANCE OUT OF HIS
MOUTH WHEN A MAJOR FAILURE OCCURRED AT 0400 APRIL 3,
UNRELATED TO ANY "LOAD-SHEDDING" SCHEME OF THE GEC.
ALL OF GEORGETOWN WAS BLACKED OUT AND THOUGH SERVICE TO
HOSPITALS AND CERTAIN OTHER PRIORITY SUBSCRIBERS WAS

RESTORED WITHIN FOUR HOURS, RESIDENTIAL AREAS WERE BLACKED OUT FOR THIRTY-SIX CONSECUTIVE HOURS. SINCE LATE AFTERNOON APRIL 4 SERVICE HAS BEEN AVAILABLE TO SOME RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS ON AN INTERMITTENT BASIS AVERAGING ONE HOUR OUT OF SIX. SOME OF THE POORER SECTIONS HAVE, HOWEVER, BEEN OUT FOR AS LONG AS 48 TO 60 HOURS.

3. THE GEC HAS REPORTEDLY MADE ARRANGEMENTS TO PURCHASE THREE NEW BOILER TUBES BUT THEY ARE NOT SCHEDULED TO ARRIVE IN GUYANA UNTIL AUGUST AND INSTALLATION WILL REQUIRE ANOTHER THREE OR FOUR MONTHS. MEANWHILE, THE OLD BOILERS HAVE DETERIORATED TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT WHEN BREAKDOWNS WILL OCCUR. BRITISH AND CANADIAN EXPERTS HAVE ARRIVED IN GEORGETOWN TO SEE WHAT, IF ANYTHING, CAN BE DONE TO KEEP THE OLD PLANT RUNNING UNTIL THE NEW EQUIPMENT IS OPERATING.

4. NOR IS ELECTRICITY THE ONLY PUBLIC SERVICE THAT HAS BROKEN DOWN. GUYANA'S RECENT EXCEPTIONAL SPELL OF DRY WEATHER HAS RESULTED IN A SEVERE WATER SHORTAGE AS THE LEVEL OF THE LAMAHA CONSERVANCE, WHICH SERVES AS THE RESERVOIR FOR GEORGETOWN, HAS DROPPED TO NEW LOWS. AS THIS HAS HAPPENED, SALT WATER FROM THE ATLANTIC HAS ENTERED THE SYSTEM THROUGH CREEKS AND CANALS. AS A CONSEQUENCE, GEORGETOWN RESIDENTS HAVE HAD TO CONTENT WITH WATER PRESSURE SO LOW THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO GET WATER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FOR MORE THAN A FEW HOURS A DAY AND WHEN ATTAINABLE THE HIGH SALINITY OF THE WATER MAKES IT UNPALATABLE FOR DRINKING AND LARGELY UNSUITABLE FOR BATHING OR THE WASHING OF CLOTHES.

5. THE LACK OF FRESH WATER HAS ALSO RESULTED IN EXTREMELY UNSANITARY CONDITIONS IN THE CITY'S FRESH PRODUCE MARKETS AND IN THE SEWAGE SYSTEM. THIS, COUPLED WITH A MAJOR SHORTAGE OF DRUGS AND MEDICINES, HAS RAISED PUBLIC CONCERN REGARDING THE POSSIBLE SPREAD OF CONTAGIOUS OR INFECTIOUS DISEASE.

6. A MULTITUDE OF SHORTAGES HAS ALSO HIT THE GUYANESE SHOPPER. LONG LINES HAVE FORMED FOR SUCH ITEMS HAS CHICKEN, EGGS, MARGARINE, SOAP, SOAP POWDER, COOKING OIL, AND TOILET PAPER TO NAME A FEW OF THE MORE CONSPICIOUS ITEMS IN SHORT SUPPLY. ARGUMENTS AND FISTFIGHTS HAVE BROKEN OUT AMONG SHOPPERS STRUGGLING TO OBTAIN THE LAST BAR OF SOAP OR BOX OF DETERGENT ON STORE SHELVES. ITEMS SUCH AS SOAP POWDER AND BARS OF SOAP ARE BEING RATIONED ONE TO A CUSTOMER AND SUPPLIES RUN OUT LONG BEFORE EVERY SHOPPER HAS BEEN SERVED.

7. THE ERRATIC SUPPLIES OF ELECTRICITY AND WATER HAVE

CAUSED WORK IN MOST GEORGETOWN OFFICES AND BUSINESSES
TO SHIFT INTO LOW GEAR AND PRODUCTIVITY HAS DROPPED
SHARPLY, ADDING TO THE OTHER SHORTAGES.

8. COMMENT: THE SEVERE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN HAS HAD A
STRONG EFFECT ON PUBLIC MORALE. THE AVERAGE GUYANESE
SEEMS TO HAVE BECOME DEMORALIZED OVER THE SHARP DECLINE
IN HIS STANDARD OF LIVING. DESPITE THE OCCASIONAL
SCUFFLES WHICH HAVE BROKEN OUT AT VARIOUS STORES, THERE
HAS BEEN NO INDICATION AS YET OF CIVIL DISTURBANCES.
NEVERTHELESS, GIVEN THE NON-AVAILABILITY OF ESSENTIALS
AND THE SOARING COSTS OF OTHER PRODUCTS THE FRAYED PUBLIC
TEMPER COULD ERUPT IN AN INCIDENT IN ONE OF THE CROWDED
MARKETS SOME MORNING.
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